

**Testimony before the Joint Committee on Higher Education and Employment
Advancement
February 28, 2019**

SB 273: An Act Concerning Debt-Free College

David S Woodworth

Good afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Haddad, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee.

My name is David Woodworth and I am a registered voter in Winsted.

I am here to testify in support of SB 273, An Act Concerning Debt-Free College.

My first year of college was at Northwestern CT Community College (NCCC), where a scholarship based on financial need covered my tuition completely, since my older brother was still at RIT and my parents earned a middle-class income.

Like many students, I transferred to an out-of-state 4-year institution, partly because no local college offered the program I was interested in, and also because I wanted to get away from my parents and experience life outside of CT. I ended up graduating in 2004 from Wentworth in Boston and currently owe \$4000 in student loans 15 years later, which includes numerous deferments based on economic hardship.

I'm grateful for the education and experience I got from going to college at a young age, however, as a returning student at Northwestern, I feel I am now in a better place to fully appreciate the learning process and strongly benefit from believing I am now pursuing my true passions.

Of particular interest to you, as this bill is further discussed, is the fact that most students that attend Northwestern come from Winsted and Torrington, where the population of Hispanic citizens has grown significantly in the past few decades. However this growth is not even closely reflected in the makeup of the student body at Northwestern. If funding is available to provide debt-free community colleges, I urge you to restore funding to remedial classes that do not count toward degree programs, or consider reclassifying English as a Second Language (ESL) courses as Non-remedial. Scholastic aptitude does not discriminate based on country of origin. Why does this barrier of entry exist to a quality college education based upon lack of ESL courses? In today's diverse economy being multi-lingual is, and should be, considered a competitive edge in the hiring process.

Certain programs and certificates are currently covered by SNAP scholarships.

I am now going to implore you to EXPAND upon the current scope of this bill to include ALL CT public colleges are universities, like pre-1972.

In 2018 Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) commissioned a study to thoroughly examine the overall impact of ALL 17 institutions on the state of Connecticut. (CSCU) Economic Impact Analysis Key Findings:

- CSCU contributes \$11 billion annually to the state of CT
- Alumni contribute \$9.9 billion in annual income through their earnings
- 1 out of 19 jobs in CT is supported by CSCU activities and their students
- For every \$1 spent, students gain \$6.60 in lifetime earnings, taxpayers gain \$3.80 in added tax revenue and savings, and CT gains \$11.70 in added state revenue and savings
- Annually the average certificate, associate, and bachelor's degree graduate from CSCU earns \$5,900, \$12,800, and \$37,200 more compared to a person with a high school diploma or equivalent working in Connecticut

We don't have time to go over the complete findings of the 103-page report here and now about the economic impact of CSCU, but...IT'S A LOT!

Thank you for your time and consideration in the further development of SB273.

Reference:

CSCU Releases First Ever Statewide Economic Impact Study (Posted: 12/5/18).

http://www.ct.edu/newsroom/cscu_releases_first_ever_statewide_economic_impact_study?fbclid=IwAR0LzvCrN1P9OwTQGQIsNzf2VbmLGoyTu3b_zZGo2pTI3kQzLvqzXu2L1sk